



# Children & Family News

March 2004

---

*N.D. Dept. of Human Services' Children & Family Services Division Update*

---

## **Meth Use Continues To Impact Foster Care**

The number of children placed in the North Dakota foster care system because of methamphetamine-related issues including parental drug usage, manufacturing, and selling, continues to grow.

Since July 1, 2003, the percentage of children entering foster care due to meth abuse has risen to 23.7 percent of the caseload. This is an 8.7 percent increase in six months.

In September 2003, Children and Family Services director Paul Ronningen testified before the Budget Committee on Government Services regarding the impact of meth abuse on child welfare. At that time, about 117 children or 15 percent of the children in foster care were in care because a parent or guardian was using, manufacturing, or selling meth.

In comparison, the overall foster care caseload grew by five percent between July 2003 and February 2004. An average of 1,214 children were in care during February 2004.

The department will look at the data again this spring. There may have been some under-reporting because some of the data had not been entered on children who recently entered care.

## **Statute Change Requires Response To Pregnant Women Abusing Substances**

Viewing pregnancy as a "window of opportunity" for intervention in maternal drug use, the state's medical community successfully advocated for an amendment to North Dakota's child abuse and neglect law during the 2003 session. The new law requires reporting the use of a controlled substance or alcohol abuse by pregnant

women. This prenatal intervention is intended to promote prevention, early problem identification, education, and treatment.

The human service system will respond to a report by conducting an assessment and offering appropriate services such as a referral to chemical dependency treatment. Information about the effects of chemical use during pregnancy will also be provided.

If successful, the effort may produce cost savings in the health care, foster care, special education, and corrections systems.

## **SSI Eligibility Review Update**

F. M. Blake and Associates, the company contracted to review Supplemental Security Income (SSI) eligibility for foster children in North Dakota has completed the initial round of case reviews. The reviews, which began in October 2003, have identified about 65 children who may be eligible for SSI benefits. The number of children actually eligible is unknown because the application process hasn't been completed and there may also be appeals.

If a child is eligible for SSI, the federal government will pay about \$552 per month for foster care-related expenses. If a child is reunited with his or her parents, the child will continue to receive SSI benefits to meet his or her care needs, and this may reduce the likelihood of a child returning to foster care.

SSI benefits are available to supplement the income of qualifying disabled people including children who meet income and asset criteria as determined by the Social Security Administration. SSI is intended to meet basic needs including food, clothing, and shelter.

Over®

## Region V Commended For Review Results

The Children and Family Services Division publicly praised Region V for meeting child safety, permanency, and well-being standards as outlined in the federal Children and Family Services Review. The region, which includes Cass, Steele, Traill, Ransom, Sargent, and Richland counties, is one of three regions reviewed to date in 2004. The Bismarck and Jamestown administrative regions have been reviewed, and the Grand Forks region's review is in April.

As part of the state's program improvement plan, a review team travels to each administrative region annually and pulls eight random cases evaluating them based on federal and state child welfare standards. The evaluation involves interviews with parents and other stakeholders such as court and school personnel. While not statistically significant, the reviews are completed on a larger sample than federal reviews and are valuable for assessing child welfare services.

State foster care administrator Don Snyder said, "We've implemented some policy changes in order to comply with federal standards, and this is one way of checking implementation across the state."

Snyder said reviews look at factors such as repeat maltreatment, foster care reentry, worker visits with the child, whether a child's physical or mental health needs are being met, and much more.

Region V showed improvements in all areas except preserving connections and worker visits with parents. Snyder praised county and state staff who deliver child welfare services for their accomplishments.

He said the reviews benefit the whole child welfare system, and strengths identified in Region V will be shared.

"We can borrow best practices in a region and introduce them in other regions," he said.

This sharing also applies to partnering entities such as the courts, juvenile services, school systems, health care systems, and others. The ongoing effort will help North Dakota conform to federal standards.

## N.D. Selected For Juvenile Justice Policy Academy

North Dakota has been selected to participate in a policy academy focusing on diverting youth with mental health and co-occurring substance abuse disorders from the juvenile justice system. The Department of Human Services (DHS) and the Division of Juvenile Services (DJS) submitted the state's application, which was selected from a pool of over 50.

This federally-sponsored initiative will provide national expertise and assistance as North Dakota works to craft collaborative programs and services for young people with mental health and substance abuse needs. State team participants in the June academy include Dave McGeary, South Central Judicial District Juvenile Court; a young woman involved in the DJS system; Susan Wagner, DJS; Karen Larson, DHS – Division of Mental Health & Substance Abuse Services; Paul Ronningen, DHS – Children & Family Services Division; Carlotta McCleary, Federation of Families; and JoAnne Hoesel, DHS – children's mental health services.

## State Submits Program Improvement Plan

North Dakota submitted its Children and Family Services Review Program Improvement Plan to the federal Children and Family Services Administration's regional office. A federal official was in Bismarck in mid-March and reviewed it.

"North Dakota is on track and is preparing to submit the next quarterly report. All regions of the state are making very positive improvements," said CFS division director Paul Ronningen.

### N.D. Department of Human Services Children & Family Services Division

Paul Ronningen, Division Director  
600 E Boulevard Ave., Bismarck ND 58505-0250  
(701) 328-2316, Email: [dhscfs@state.nd.us](mailto:dhscfs@state.nd.us)  
TTY: 701-328-3480